

22 MAY 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Management and Services

SUBJECT : GAO Report to Congress on the 'Need to Improve
Language Training Programs and Assignments for
U.S. Government Personnel Overseas'

1. During the past two years the Government Accounting Office conducted a review of U.S. Government foreign language training programs and the language aspects of assigning personnel overseas. The final report was submitted to Congress on 22 January 1973. This memorandum summarizes some of the conclusions and recommendations that may have relevance to CIA even though intelligence agencies were excluded from the report because of the classified nature of their activities. It is probable that in future budget hearings Congress may ask CIA about its language activities with reference to the GAO findings.

2. Background

In 1960 Congress amended the Foreign Service Act making it congressional policy that all members of the Foreign Service speak the principal language of the countries to which they are assigned. The amendment further stipulated that those positions requiring the incumbent to be proficient in a foreign language be so identified and staffed. Although this legislation is not directly applicable to all agencies and departments operating overseas, GAO believes it represents congressional policy toward all agencies having requirements for language-proficient personnel. The GAO study therefore was made to identify, on a Government-wide basis, the magnitude of foreign language training activity, to evaluate the fulfillment of foreign language needs, and to determine whether improvements were needed in the use of resources devoted to foreign language training in the U.S. Government.

3. Principal Conclusions of the GAO Report

- The intent of the 1960 legislation has not been met. During the past decade there has been little progress toward substantially raising the foreign language competence of U.S. representatives overseas.
- In virtually all agencies studied, language-essential positions were staffed with individuals lacking the required foreign language competence.

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- Key factors hindering the attainment of increased foreign language competence overseas were:
 - a. lack of emphasis on the use of personnel with foreign language capability;
 - b. lack of criteria for identifying foreign language requirements; and
 - c. inadequate proficiency testing.
- Part-time language training is a poor substitute for full-time training and should not be used as such.
- More systematic coordination of foreign language training and research is needed among federal agencies.

4. GAO Recommendations

- Assign language-proficient staff to positions overseas that require language competence.
- Provide individuals with appropriate language training before they assume duties in language-essential positions overseas.
- Develop adequate criteria for overseas posts to use in identifying the level of proficiency required for each position.
- Periodically reassess language requirements for overseas positions.
- Develop tests and testing procedures that will adequately measure language proficiencies.
- Provide for mandatory retesting of individuals before assigning them to language-essential position overseas.
- Periodically retest all those with language proficiency so that assignments to duty or training can be made on the basis of current capabilities.
- Expand coordination of individual research programs and develop procedures for making research results available Government-wide.

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5. Also noteworthy is that GAO has emphasized to Congress that they believe the present level of foreign language training in the executive branch to be sufficient to meet current needs, provided a greater weight is given to the language capability factor in selecting people for overseas assignment.

6. The agencies studied generally agreed with GAO's conclusions and recommendations and cited corrective actions planned or already taken. For example, the State Department advised GAO in August of 1972 that it had invited those agencies involved to meet and begin discussions as to the most effective means of achieving closer coordination and the sharing of resources. This is being done through the expanded activities of the Interagency Language Roundtable of which OTR's Language School is a member.

STATINTL

Alfonso Rodriguez
Director of Training

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STATINTL

ADMINISTRATIVE - INTERNAL USE ONLY

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : General Accounting Office Report on Language
Development and Language Training

During the past two years the General Accounting Office has been conducting a review of U.S. Government foreign language training programs and the language aspects of assigning personnel overseas. The final GAO report was submitted to Congress on 22 January 1973. We were not on the initial routing, but we have procured copies of the document. The principal conclusions and recommendations, relating primarily to language development and coordination of language training, are directed to overt agencies and departments of the government such as State, Defense, AID, USIA, ACTION, and others. However, because CIA has need for language skills equal to those agencies cited above, it is quite probable that CIA's performance with regard to these subjects may arise in future budget hearings before the Congress. Therefore, for your information I have extracted from the GAO report 1) the digest at the beginning of the report and 2) specific conclusions and recommendations in the body of the report which may have relevance to this Agency.

Alfonso Rodriguez
Director of Training

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

NEED TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE TRAINING
PROGRAMS AND ASSIGNMENTS FOR U.S.
GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL OVERSEAS
B-176049

D I G E S T

WHY THE REVIEW WAS MADE

In 1960 the Congress enacted legislation requiring that foreign language competence of key U.S. Government representatives overseas be improved substantially to increase the effectiveness of U.S. representation abroad both with the "man in the street" and with foreign government representatives.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) made its review to

- determine the scope of Federal Government foreign language training,
- appraise progress in improving foreign language skills of U.S. Government representatives overseas after enactment of the legislation, and
- evaluate effectiveness of U.S. foreign language training programs.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The intent of the 1960 legislation has not been met.

About 18,000 persons from 60 Federal entities, excluding intelligence agencies, are trained annually in about 150 foreign languages. The cost, including student salaries and allowances, totals about \$60 million. (See p. 13.)

The cost of language training at the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State, including tuition, student salary, and related expenses, ranges from \$9,500 for a 20-week course in French in Washington, D.C., to \$56,000 for a 21-month course in Arabic at Beirut, Lebanon. (See p. 13.)

Little progress was achieved in the past decade toward substantially raising foreign language competence of U.S. representatives overseas. Language-essential positions not satisfactorily filled in the State Department increased from 38 percent in 1963 to 43 percent in 1972. (See pp. 17 and 19.)

In virtually all agencies language-essential positions were staffed with individuals lacking the required foreign language capability. Key factors hindering attainment of increased foreign language competence overseas were

- lack of emphasis on use of personnel having foreign language capability,
- lack of criteria for identifying foreign language requirements, and
- inadequate proficiency testing. (See pp. 17 and 38.)

Part-time language training programs should not be used as a substitute for full-time training. Part-time programs do not increase

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proficiency to a professional level in time for use by those assigned overseas. (See p. 53.)

The Defense Language Institute of the Department of Defense has not established an adequate inventory of command-sponsored foreign language training programs or fulfilled its responsibilities for management control and technical supervision. (See p. 64.)

The three Foreign Service Institute schools overseas generally were effective in training students to a minimum proficiency. Some students, however, were unable to successfully complete the course because of inadequate aptitude or motivation that should have been apparent before their enrollment. (See p. 57.)

More systematic coordination among Federal agencies of foreign language training and research is needed. (See pp. 74 and 83.)

RECOMMENDATIONS OR SUGGESTIONS

The Secretaries of State, Defense, and Agriculture; the Director, United States Information Agency; and the Administrator, Agency for International Development, each should develop a plan of action for his agency to improve use of foreign language capabilities, giving particular attention to:

- Assigning language-proficient staff to positions overseas with language requirements. (See p. 51.)
- Providing individuals with appropriate language training before they assume duties in language-essential positions overseas. (See p. 61.)

--Developing adequate criteria for overseas posts to use in identifying the specific level of proficiency required for each overseas position. (See p. 50.)

--Periodically reassessing language requirements for overseas positions and developing tests and testing procedures that will measure adequately language proficiencies of individuals. (See p. 51.)

--Mandatory retesting of individuals before assigning them to language-essential positions overseas. (See p. 51.)

--Periodically retesting those with language proficiencies. (See p. 51.)

The Secretaries of State; Defense; and Health, Education, and Welfare and the Director of ACTION should expand their coordination of individual research programs and develop procedures for making research results available on a Government-wide basis. (See p. 81.)

The Secretary of State should restrict enrollment in advanced language programs overseas to students demonstrating the aptitude and motivation (see p. 61) and should initiate (1) a program for inter-governmental use of foreign language training resources (see p. 62) and (2) an interagency committee whereby foreign language training resources can be used to the maximum extent by U.S. agencies. (See pp. 62 and 90.)

The Secretary of Defense should revise the Department's instructions on foreign language training. These should clearly establish the authority and responsibility of the

Defense Language Institute and the military commands to set up and give final approval to such training. In addition, the military departments' responsibility for complying with the instructions should be emphasized. (See p. 72.) The Secretary of Defense should inquire into the propriety of the operation of those Department of Defense language schools not under the technical supervision of the Defense Language Institute. (See p. 72.)

The Civil Service Commission should request and publish information from all agencies having foreign language training programs available for use by other agencies and (see p. 91) should require agencies planning to initiate new language training activities to furnish advance notice. (See p. 91.)

AGENCY ACTIONS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

Agencies involved generally agreed with the above conclusions and recommendations and cited actions taken or planned for correction.

The Department of State, however, identified problems with GAO's recommendation for periodic proficiency retesting, saying that it was exploring alternative means of developing timely and accurate inventories of foreign language proficiency levels of its personnel.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION
BY THE CONGRESS

Indications are that the present level of foreign language training in the executive branch is sufficient to meet current needs, if a greater weight is given to the language capability factor in selecting people for overseas posts.

The Appropriations Committees and other committees of the Congress may want to (1) explore this matter with the agencies involved in connection with their future fund requests and (2) require the executive branch to periodically report on progress made toward assigning language-proficient personnel to key posts overseas.

CHAPTER 4 -- FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INADEQUATE LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Personnel with foreign language proficiencies were not utilized to fill the language-essential positions. Other positions were not accurately identified as to their language requirements, and criteria for making such identifications were generally lacking.

In our opinion, the high rate of unfilled language-essential positions and low utilization of language-proficient personnel, indicate a general need to place greater emphasis on the importance of either assigning language-proficient personnel to language-essential positions overseas or assigning persons to training prior to assignment overseas.

We believe the staffing of language-essential positions could be improved by establishing definitive criteria for designating those positions requiring a proficiency and by maintaining an accurate inventory of language-proficient personnel for use as an assignment and training tool.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recognize that the problems discussed above exist in varying degrees in the agencies. We believe, however, that greater use of language capabilities can be achieved in each agency. We recommend that the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Agriculture; the Director, USIA; and the Administrator, AID, after considering the findings discussed in this report, develop plans for their agencies to achieve improved use of language capabilities.

Particular attention should be given to:

- Placing appropriate emphasis on assigning language-proficient staff to overseas language-essential positions.
- Establishing adequate criteria for post use in periodically identifying the specific level of proficiency in a foreign language for each overseas position.
- Periodic review and reassessment of the language requirements for overseas positions and development of tests and testing procedures that will adequately measure the language proficiencies of the personnel needed for such positions.
- Mandatory retesting of personnel for language proficiencies prior to assignment to duty in language-essential positions.
- Periodic updating of personnel language-proficiency test records so that assignments to duty or training can be made on the basis of staffs' current capabilities.

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CHAPTER 5 -- STATE DEPARTMENT OVERSEAS LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS
AND SCHOOLS

CONCLUSIONS

We believe that it is impractical to attempt to train personnel to a minimum professional proficiency through the post part-time language programs because of the time required to learn a foreign language. Achieving a significant increase in proficiency through these programs generally requires all or most of employees' tours of duty. Accordingly, this program should not be used to train those requiring a minimum professional proficiency for their assigned duties unless they arrive at the post with a language proficiency which is close to the required level.

Because the post programs alone cannot realistically be expected to bring personnel to a high level of proficiency, we believe that personnel selected for language-essential positions overseas should have acquired the necessary proficiency prior to departure for the post.

We believe that enrollment to State Department overseas field schools should be limited to those students showing a strong aptitude and desire for learning and that the results of preliminary training generally given prior to the advanced training overseas should be more thoroughly examined to screen out those students not likely to succeed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Agriculture; the Director, USIA; and the Administrator, AID, require appropriate language training of staff before they assume duties in language-essential positions overseas.

We also recommend that the Secretary of State have procedures established to restrict enrollment in the advanced language programs at the field schools to students demonstrating the requisite aptitude and motivation.

CHAPTER 7 -- NEED FOR MORE SYSTEMATIC COORDINATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Secretaries of State; Defense; and Health, Education, and Welfare; and the Director of ACTION, establish the goal of optimal sharing of the costs and benefits of future research related to foreign language training and that they:

1. Expand their efforts toward a systematic and voluntary coordination of their individual research programs.
2. Develop procedures for making research results available on a Government-wide basis.